

DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

news release

For Release November 2, 1977

Levitt 202/343-5634

MAJOR STUDY OF AMERICAN ATTITUDES TOWARD WILDLIFE AND NATURAL AREAS BEGUN

The most comprehensive study yet done of the American public's attitudes toward wildlife and natural areas will be conducted by Yale University under a recently awarded grant announced today by the Interior Department's U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

"This is a bold new step for the Fish and Wildlife Service," Director Lynn A. Greenwalt said. "Never before have we undertaken such a large-scale effort to determine the human dimension that affects wildlife management. The results of this investigation will help us to promote greater citizen participation in the decisionmaking process and in our future plans to manage wildlife for the benefit of all Americans."

Dr. Stephen Kellert, a senior research associate at Yale's School of Forestry and Environmental Studies, will serve as principal investigator of the 3-year study. He is one of the Nation's foremost authorities on public attitudes toward wildlife. His research, much of which has been sponsored by the Service, is generally regarded as the most definitive work to date on the factors that influence how people perceive and are likely to behave toward wildlife.

"Most conservationists are already aware that for many species and for many areas of the country, we can no longer simply 'leave it to nature' to assure that wildlife will survive and do well in this country," Greenwalt said. "Man has already intervened with his cities, agriculture, pollution, recreation, and a host of other activities. And he must continue to intervene to ensure that those species and natural areas will be preserved for generations to come. This is a basic tenet of sound wildlife management."

"Knowledge of human attitudes and perceptions about wildlife and their habitat can be just as valuable to wildlife management practices as is the latest waterfowl population census or the number of acres of wetlands drained each year."

"This new knowledge will fill a serious information void. It will greatly improve our understanding of the many important changes taking place in the constituency of the Fish and Wildlife Service and how those changes are likely to influence policy and the way we allocate resources to solve wildlife management problems."

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Preliminary results of the study are expected by June 1979. The study will focus on the results of data collected from personal interviews with 3,000 randomly selected Americans--2,700 over age 18 and 300 under age 18.

Major areas of investigation include:

- Trends and significant changes in American attitudes toward wildlife at the national and regional levels and the implications for species not hunted or fished.

- The size, distribution, social characteristics, and attitudes of key wildlife interest groups such as birdwatchers, backpackers, trappers, and hunters.

- Public perceptions of crucial issues affecting wildlife and their natural habitat (e.g., concern about endangered species, preservation of wetlands and other fragile habitats, the impact on wildlife of energy exploration and development).

- The identification of critical stages in the development of young people's attitudes toward wildlife and the implications for environmental education.

- Aesthetic and symbolic values attached to wildlife.

- The extent to which factors, such as education, occupation, place of birth, and present residence (urban vs. rural), influence attitudes toward wildlife.

- The identification of appropriate ways to improve cooperation between hunters and non-hunters to protect wildlife and natural habitat.

Several of the key features of the study--non-game wildlife, endangered species, habitat preservation--were strongly emphasized in President Carter's Message to Congress on the Environment (May 23, 1977).

In addition to being extremely helpful to the Interior Department, the data from this study is expected to be useful to local park and planning commissions, State fish and wildlife agencies, educational institutions, and conservation organizations.

To ensure that the study results are valid and useful to wildlife professionals, the Service has established an informal advisory committee composed of leading conservationists and private citizens who have volunteered their time to assist in the development of the study. Among the organizations represented on the committee are the Environmental Defense Fund, International Council for Bird Preservation, National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, New York Zoological Society, AFL-CIO, International Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies, Humane Society of the United States, National Wildlife Federation, and the League of Women Voters.